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ABSTRACT

This paper considers the characteristics and outcomes that occurred for girls who experienced suspension or expulsion from school using data (N=1,084; 527 boys and 557 girls) from an ongoing investigation of suspension within 5 sections of elementary schools in the Baltimore public schools. The data included gender specific analysis of shared and non-shared risk factors between boys and girls. Girls were found to be half as likely to be removed from school as their male peers. Being rated as more aggressive than their peers in first grade increased their risk for removal, as did being of African American descent. Understanding gender specific variations related to school removal will allow a clearer understanding of the precursors leading up to school problems for girls. Ongoing work on how to evaluate individual baseline characteristics for school entry and academic success will help schools identify at-risk students. Being aware of the relationship among individual, school, and community characteristics will provide information for developing interventions to prevent later school difficulties. Evidence of the important gender differences in school removal highlights the risk factors that need to be targeted in future preventive interventions to increase the likelihood of successful outcomes. (Contains 3 tables.) (JDM)

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SUSPENDED: Girls in Trouble

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Abstract

Research on school removal, either through suspension or expulsion, typically focuses on boys who have higher rates of removal than do girls. In light of the limited empirical study of this issue, the present study focuses on the characteristics and outcomes related to girls who experience this event. Girls were half as likely to be removed as were boys. Being rated as more aggressive than their peers in first grade increased the risk for removal as did being of African American descent. This evidence of important gender differences in school removal highlights risk factors to be targeted in future preventive interventions for more successful life outcomes.

SUSPENDED: Girls in Trouble

Suspension from school is not only an adjudicated event, but is also an indicator of serious problems for school age children; it shows difficulties with adaptation to school and may lead to further disciplinary problems. More than two million children are suspended from school each year in the United States (Harris et al., 1983) and little is known about the precursors leading up to this type of disciplinary action or the long term consequences related to school removal and the consequent labeling associated with suspension. In addition, as boys are suspended from school (Costenbader & Markson, 1998; Morgan, 1991; Stevens, 1983) at higher rates than are girls, research on suspension typically focuses on boys. Recent research has begun to focus on gender differences in suspension (Hay, 2000; McFadden, Marsh, Price, & Hwang, 1992) and long term effects related to school removals (Just, 1984). In the Baltimore Prevention Program (BPP) (e.g., Kellam, Mayer, Rebok, & Hawkins, 1998 for details regarding this project) one third of the students suspended between first and seventh grade were girls. This non-trivial proportion of suspended girls suggests that important gender differences underlie these numbers. In analyzing this gender effect, important questions revolve around reasons for removal, removal frequency, and individual characteristics associated with suspension.

This presentation is a more restrictive view of an ongoing project investigating suspension within the BPP. Here the focus is on a gender specific analysis of shared and non-shared risks for suspension. To begin to understand these questions, cluster analysis was utilized to explore groups of school removal characteristics.

Method

Community Epidemiology. Data originated from a longitudinal study (n=1084; 527 boys and 557 girls) composed of students in elementary schools in five epidemiologically defined areas of eastern Baltimore who participated in randomized preventive intervention trials beginning in 1985 (Kellam & Rebok, 1992). The subsample reported here include those children who had school removals between 1985 and 1992 (n=328.) School removal here includes three classifications of suspension: disciplinary removals (removal for less than ten days), long term suspension (longer than ten days), and expulsion (removal for the remaining term.) The subsample included 120 girls (34.8%.) In terms of ethnicity, 87% of the girls and 80% of the boys were African American. No significant differences were found for urban area, with 76.2% of the girls and 65.1% of the boys living in two of the poorest areas of eastern Baltimore (X^2=5.5, df=4, p=.239.) Mean number of suspensions for girls was 2.1 (median=1). For boys the mean number of suspensions was 2.8 (median=2.) Given these means, 60% of the girls and 80% of the boys were only removed from school once. The majority of girls (86.1%) and boys (78.8%) had only disciplinary removals (X^2=10.59, df=5, p=.060.) There was a significant difference in grade of first school removal with the majority of girls being removed in sixth and seventh grades (88.1%) and boys (54%.)

Cluster analysis was utilized to detect homogenous groups within the data set which were then validated through discriminant analysis. Cluster analysis used the Ward's method, an agglomerative hierarchical cluster analysis procedure that merges clusters based on the smallest increase in the overall sum of the squared within-cluster

distance (i.e., the error sum of squares.) Seven variables were entered into the analysis; sex, free lunch status, race, teacher ratings of Authority Acceptance (includes the following items: *Breaks Rules, Fights, Harms Others, Lies, Stubborn, Teases Classmates, Yells at Others, Breaks Things, Harms Property, and Takes Others Property)*, patterns of school removal, grade of first removal, and reasons for school removal. Based on the error sum of squares (denoted "coefficient" in SPSS) three clusters were defined for this data.

Results and Discussion

Hierarchical cluster analysis utilizing a Ward's Method resulted in a three-cluster solution. A discriminant analysis showed that the variables sufficiently separated the three clusters ($F=92.4$, $df1=14$, $df2=638$, $p=.000$.) Classification analysis resulted in 82% of cases correctly classified. Cluster one included 154 students, cluster two had 120 students, and the remaining 54 were located in cluster three. Significant gender differences occurred across clusters with more girls being in cluster one (64% of the 154 students.) An additional 28% of the girls were located in cluster three.

Cluster one included a majority of African American girls who qualified for subsidized lunch (see table 1 for a complete description with percentages) who more frequently had only disciplinary removals and had their first removal in 7th grade. In regards to reasons for removal, they were seen as more disrespectful and involved in attacking students and/or staff. When evaluating their aggression levels in first and sixth grades, they were less likely to be rated as highly aggressive on the teacher ratings of Authority Acceptance.

Cluster two included 95% boys. Details of these students can be seen in table 2.

Cluster three included mostly students who did not quality for subsidized lunch and were of European American descent (see table 3 for a complete description with percentages.) These students were not rated as aggressive by their teachers on Authority Acceptance and they tended to only experienced disciplinary removals. Many of these students experienced their first suspension in elementary school (62%.) Reasons for removal was typically either disrespect or attacking a student.

These results suggest that it is possible to separate removed students into clusters that differ in regard to gender, race, poverty, as well a the behaviors causing and the outcomes of school removal. These clusters are more clearly differentiated for boys than for girls. Both teacher ratings of Authority Acceptance and reasons for school removal are significantly different for boys within the clusters but not for girls. Given the low number of girls in clusters two and three a more definitive analysis would include only girls. This work is ongoing and is currently under review (for more details please contact the first author.)

Even so, hints of important differences among removed girls can be found within this analysis. Most girls were not rated high on Authority Acceptance but the girls in clusters two and three do show higher ratings on these aggressive items. Additionally, girls split in terms of whether or not they qualified for subsidized lunch. Finally, differences in both reasons for school removal and the grade of first school removal are suggested by how girls were located within the different clusters.

In conclusion, understanding gender specific variations related to school removal will allow a clearer understanding of the precursors leading up to school problems for girls. Additional ongoing work at BPP is evaluating individual baseline characteristics

for school entry as well as academic success or failure. Understanding the interactions among individual, school, and community characteristics will provide important information for developing interventions to prevent later school difficulties. In conjunction with understand how gender relates to these variables will allow the development of interventions that focus more specifically on the precursors leading to school removal for girls.

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Table 1
Description of Cluster 1 (N=154)

- females (64%)
- African-American (99%)
- subsidized lunch (72%)
- rated as highly aggressive (42%)
- disciplinary removals only (92%)
- first removal in 7th grade (71%)

- Disrespect, indecent exposure etc. (67%)
- attack of students/staff (51%)
- theft, vandalism (7%)
- explosives, bomb threats (2%)
- threat, shakedown (5%)

Table 2
Description of Cluster 2 (N=120)

- males (95%)
- African-American (96%)
- subsidized lunch (66%)
- rated as highly aggressive (63%)
- disciplinary removals only (99%)
- first removal in 6 & 7th grade (42%)
- Disrespect, indecent exposure etc. (63%)
- attack of students/staff (68%)
- theft, vandalism (8%)
- explosives, bomb threats (13%)
- threat, shakedown (8%)

Table 3
Description of Cluster 3 (N=54)

- males (72%)
- European-American (91%)
- non-subsidized lunch (78%)
- rated as low aggressive (63%)
- disciplinary removals only (76%)
- first removal in Elementary School (62%)
- Disrespect, indecent exposure etc. (53%)
- attack of students/staff (53.7%)
- theft, vandalism (7%)
- explosives, bomb threats (22%)
- threat, shakedown (7%)